

LOVE STORY OF VINCENT ASTOR, AMERICA'S RICHEST BACHELOR

Defies the Rules of Romance Writers and Will Wed the Charming Girl He Has Loved Since Childhood, Miss Helen Dinsmore Huntington---A "Society Novel" of Wholesome Sweetness and Vigor



Story of Love That Began in Childish Romps in Country Fields; Blossomed Despite the Shadows of Divorce, and Ripened in Sympathy after the Tragedy of the Titanic.

By Marguerite Moores Marshall.

The love-story the professional romancer never dares to invent has suddenly become reality. If the p. r. were making a hero of Vincent Astor, the young man would be driven reluctantly into one of two matrimonial blind alleys. He would be captured by a society belle with a heart as hard as a diamond solitaire and about the size of one. No novelist would permit America's richest bachelor to marry a girl whom he really and truly loves, and whom he can introduce to his mother.

Yet Miss Helen Dinsmore Huntington, whose engagement to Mr. Astor has just been announced, answers correctly to both formulas. The tale of her wooing, a society novel of fact, not fancy, reads typically American in its wholesome sweetness and vigor. Here it is:

CHAPTER I.

Romance Begins in Plays of Childhood.

A white-cheeked, slender boy, just over the edge of boyhood, knelt in his nursery, wistful and wrinkled his nose despondently against the pane. His clothes would look a bit queer to-day, but they were marvels of daintiness sixteen years ago. His nursery, too, was a wonder created by loving forethought that had dipped down into the purse of Fortunio. He had at his youthful disposal an entire floor of the large-size brownstone residence at No. 610 Fifth avenue, and a corps of attendants so numerous that they had to be specially drilled not to walk on each other's heels. Yet Vincent Astor, the six-year-old son and heir of the multi-millionaire social arbiter of America, beat a tattoo on his window pane and rushed out shiny new boots to against the other playthings boredom. There were times when he was one of them—when he was perhaps the least happy child in New York.

For one thing, he wasn't a bit well, and little boys to the contrary notwithstanding, no child is altogether happy unless he's altogether healthy. For another thing, he had no brothers and sisters. Her brother's tenth birthday was past before Miss Muriel Astor's

first appearance in the world. Think of a youngster always "delicate" always with a cough or a sore throat or an attack of indigestion, always surrounded by solicitous grown-ups, who neither tactfully ignored his physical weakness nor showed themselves admiringly curious as children do!

WAS HOMESICK FOR HIS COUNTRY PLAYMATE.

Undoubtedly Vincent, at six, did not protest in these exact words. But he had his method. Besought to tear himself away from bloom and the irresponsible window, he made terms, "I want to go to the country and see Helen!"

Helen—other name Huntington—lived with her father and mother on one side of the old Dutch town of Rhinebeck. On the other side it was the Astor country home. When Vincent was six Helen was four, and it's admitted that they began to be pals in pinafores. Helen was a slim, serious-faced lassie with big blue eyes and a fluff of chestnut-yellow hair. There was a baby sister in Helen's family and, later on, a baby brother, but even the sister was four years younger, which is a very great deal until two persons are over twenty. Though Vincent was two years Helen's senior his physical delicacy put them on an almost equal footing, and the boy and girl got on beautifully.

Helen was an outdoor girl. She loved the sunlight and the smell of hot meadow grass and the chamomile shapes and colors of the Adirondack cloud-pictures. The beautiful Dinsmore estate, which belonged to her grandfather, president of the Adams Express Company, lay itself into a score or more pines, wind-washed hills, where one can stand and look off for miles, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." There the boy and girl might wander in careless companionship, drawing in health with every breath of the thin, clean air.

WON BACK TO HEALTH BY THEIR PLAY OUTDOORS.

Or if Helen and her governess came over to call on Vincent at Ferncliffe, the children had an unlimited choice of play-places in the sweet-smelling groves that surrounded the Astor homestead. There are brooks where violets and anemones and columbine grow, and sunny nooks thick with ferns of many different varieties. While the place is beautifully cared for, it is free from the

smug tidiness that makes a park so depressing to most children. There are stone walls and fences—and a legend of Helen's juvenile prowess in the art of fence-climbing still lingers in the land. No better medicine could have been devised for Vincent than outdoor play with a sympathetic playmate. Companionship with Helen had an excellent effect on his mind, too. For Helen's mother, who was Helen Dinsmore, a Tuxedo belle and the daughter of a multi-millionaire, never by word or look intimated to her daughter that Vincent Astor must be treated as something more precious than an ordinarily nice, likable boy. As every one knows, Col. Astor, Vincent's father, was a frankly democratic individual. But there were those brought in close contact with the heir of \$50,000,000 who saw the child wearing an aureole of gold and bowed down before him. One of Vincent Astor's real pieces of luck has been the possession of a friend like Helen Huntington, who has never valued anything about him except himself.

The first break in the companionship of the two came when Vincent was eight years old. Though his health had improved during the outdoor life at Ferncliffe, the development of tuberculosis was still feared. So Col. Astor dropped, temporarily, the management of his important estate to take his more important son to St. Moritz, in Switzerland. They remained there eight months, and Helen, with no tubercular tendencies, remained in Dutchess County.

DIDN'T "FORGET" DURING THEIR MANY SEPARATIONS.

But what fine stories he had to tell her when he returned home! Of the three big Astor dwellings, in New York, Newport and Rhinebeck, Ferncliffe has always been specially "home" to Vincent Astor.

He was ten he was taken to Newport, and there, as a prophecy of what was to come, gossip linked his name with those of two little girls. The first "crush" was said to be Polly French, the oldest daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Amos Tuck French. After her reign was over, ten-year-old Vincent was alleged to be the "particular friend" of ten-year-old Bill Brown, daughter of the James Browns and sister of the ubiquitous "Gillie." At that time Vincent was too young to give out formal denials of his intentions to the press, but if he had the opportunity he would have denied as vigorously as he's done of late years when the girl was some one else besides Helen Huntington.

And despite his journeyings the greater part of his childhood was spent at Ferncliffe, six miles from Helen's home. They attended the same dancing class, which belonged to her grandfather, president of the Adams Express Company, lay itself into a score or more pines, wind-washed hills, where one can stand and look off for miles, "the world forgetting, by the world forgot." There the boy and girl might wander in careless companionship, drawing in health with every breath of the thin, clean air.

After Vincent Astor's fourteenth birthday he was sent to Eton, the famous English boys' school. That was the second time the ocean had rolled between him and the girl whom he still called "Helen," though, as a dignified young lady of twelve, other people were beginning to put a "Miss" before her name.

CHAPTER II.

Daun of Love Shadowed by Divorce.

The most probable explanation for his temporary absence from Miss Helen's side is that the divorce between his mother and father made the son an antagonist toward the thought of romance for himself. He was devoted to the gallant colonel and to the gracious, high-born woman who for thirteen years had reigned in his home. He even had a cordial admiration and liking for his stepmother, a girl almost as young as himself. It was not an easy situation for a boy still under twenty. One can so readily imagine him looking from father to mother and saying to himself, with a shrug, "If they couldn't make a go of it, what hope for me?"

Perhaps he had a subconscious realization that only a man whose eyes are love-blind takes the leap into matrimony; perhaps he thought himself safer without the radius of Miss Helen's blue eyes.

She was not unduly worried, of course. Even a young woman has a complete idea of her life may drift away for a bit, but he drifts back closer than ever. Besides, Miss Helen was getting ready for her eighteen-year-old how to society. She was thinking hard about it and wondering if a New York round of dinners and dances would really be as enjoyable as country life at Hopeland House.

CHAPTER III.

Tragedy and Sympathy Ripen Romance.

The pressure was not long delayed. In April, 1912, came the horror that caught in its icy clutch the hearts and brains of two continents. The Titanic sank in mid-ocean and with it sank the Astor, debonair and famous to the end, offering himself to death as a willing hostage for his girl-wife.

made invulnerable by a Styx of molten gold, and he forgot that the fatal arrow pierced Achilles before his youth was past.

CHAPTER IV.

Shadow of Divorce Dulls Boy Romance.

It was a very grave and serious woman who took long walks through the Hopeland acres the autumn after Col. Astor's funeral in the gray, vine-covered Church of the Messiah at Rhinebeck. Miss Huntington, to quote once more the matron at Hopeland House, is "not so pretty that every man is going to fall in love with her after she's married, which is a very good thing."

Both the matron adds that she's a "society-looking girl," and some one else has described her as a living, daintily-brought portrait. There in the look of ease in her well-cut features and her well-set head, her hair makes for her face a softly waving frame, and the yellow of childhood now shows glints of a richer hue. She dresses most simply, usually appearing in quiet untrammelled veils, but with a veil tied under her chin. In summer she wears plain white frocks most of the time.

Both, beginning early in the fall, he went regularly to spend his week-ends

at Ferncliffe. With his mother and sister he celebrated his coming of age in that house. Mrs. Astor's friends had believed that she never would enter it again, inasmuch as she had never cared much for it, and it was the scene of the honeymoon of Madeleine Force Astor.

CHAPTER V.

Motor Trips on Week Ends with Chauffeur Chaparone.

For a year the good people of Rhinebeck have smiled wisely when the Astor motor-car flashes through their little town en route for Staatsburg, on the other side. Sometimes Vincent was in the big green touring car, sometimes in a nifty little limousine. And nine-tenths of the time Miss Huntington has sat beside him. If he drove the car Mrs. Astor or Mrs. Huntington accompanied the young people. But often a genial old chauffeur served as chaparone, with eyes that twinkled, "Ah, I knew what was coming!"

Miss Huntington doesn't ride horseback at present, but she is as fond as ever of walking and she has greatly enjoyed strolling over the Astor farm and listening to Vincent's enthusiastic discussions of scientific farming. A pet pointer and one or more Alreade terriers, to whom she is devoted, enjoy the walks, too. Then she and her lover have taken up again their old favorite tennis, and have added golf to their list of pastimes.

Both the young people are fond of the water and he has spent much time with Miss Huntington in his motor boat on the river. His yacht is near, and after a morning in the motor boat he often takes his party to the yacht for lunch. Both he and his fiancée are very fond of driving. Last winter there were gay informal skating parties on the ice just below Hopeland House.

CHAPTER VI.

Courtship Under Clear Blue Sky of Country.

It's been a country courtship, in clean air under clear blue sky, quite away from the feverish social rush of New York. Not that either Vincent or his fiancée is a recluse. Here and there, one or both of the mothers, they have visited Manhattan for gay little luncheons or theatre parties. Both the young people are fond of dancing. But they prefer, for steady diet, the quiet, unartificial life of the country. Vincent Astor has lately become the resident of Dutchess County, where, so long ago, he found health and a loyal playmate. After the marriage the young couple will make their home at Ferncliffe.

And not only the lovers but all the other people in Staatsburg and Rhinebeck seem pleased and proud. Even the butlers at Ferncliffe and Hopeland House, who have orders to wave away all strange visitors, do their waving with joyful grins. Vincent's mother and sister are enchanted with his choice and the Huntington family are delighted with Vincent. The persons who live on the motor-travelled road smile involuntarily as they tell how happy the young folks look when they're together. The most blasé and conservative citizens admit that "it seems to be a good match."

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